

Apprenticeship in Wisconsin

An Overview of Apprenticeship

The apprenticeship method of training - with a skilled worker passing on craft knowledge to another - is almost as old as recorded history, and yet it is getting new attention from federal and state policy-makers as one of the solutions being considered to help the US adapt to the international economy.

Since the Middle Ages, skills have been passed on through a master-apprentice system in which the apprentice was indentured to the master for a specified period of years. The apprentice usually received food, shelter, and clothing in return for the work the apprentice performed while indentured. This system was in widespread use until the industrial revolution created the need for more structure. The term "indenture" acquired negative meanings during the period around the American Revolution, when indentured servants were a major source of the new workers in the colonies. At the hands of unscrupulous people, however, indentured servants were treated poorly, which gave the word indenture its negative connotations.

Apprenticeship in the US continued as an unregulated system until 1911, when Wisconsin passed the country's first apprenticeship law. With safeguards for both the apprentice and the employer, Wisconsin's law became a model both for other states and for the federal government in developing their own systems. In 1911, the Wisconsin Legislature also established the state's vocational school system to provide the related classroom instruction to apprentices.

Apprenticeship training today is a formal arrangement involving employers, training professionals, labor unions, state government, vocational-technical colleges, and the individual who wants to learn a skilled trade. Modern apprenticeship programs are a combination of on-the-job training supervised by highly skilled workers at a job site, and related classroom instruction. This classroom instruction is provided throughout the term of the apprenticeship, and teaches apprentices the theoretical aspects of their trade through courses such as blueprint reading, mathematics, and sciences. Wisconsin is unique among the 50 states in requiring that employers pay their apprentices for both time worked and time spent in required classroom instruction, recognizing the equally important weight of both aspects of apprenticeship training.

The Wisconsin Apprenticeship System

Wisconsin's Apprenticeship Law was adopted to help develop the state's skilled workforce and to help protect those entering the trades. By ensuring a level of uniformity to the training that apprentices receive, it also provides an indirect protective measure to the public who utilizes the structure, products, products, and services that apprentices and graduates build, make, and provide.

The law established three basic procedures to distinguish apprenticeable trades:

1. There must be a written agreement, an indenture, between the apprentice, the sponsor, and the state. This agreement specifies plainly the length of the training, the related school requirements, an outline of the skills of the trade to be learned, and the wages the apprentice will receive.

2. Work assignments from the employer must allow the apprentice to gain a comprehensive knowledge of the trade.
3. At the end of the apprenticeship, the graduate must show competency in all the skills of the trade.

Standards for apprenticeship programs are administered by the Department of Industry, Labor and Human Relations, Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards. The Bureau jointly reviews classroom training standards with the State Board of Vocational, Technical and Adult Education, which conducts most of the classroom instruction. The Bureau also works closely with state and local apprenticeship committees for all the major trades, and with labor unions, employer associations to ensure that the Wisconsin apprenticeship system is effective.

Bureau field staff in six areas of Wisconsin help to ensure that these state standards are met by the sponsor of apprenticeship. Through a cooperative agreement with the US Department of Labor, field staff from the federal Bureau of Apprenticeship and Training also work in Wisconsin to ensure the smooth functioning of the state's apprenticeship system. The indenture that each Wisconsin apprentice works under is signed, not only by the apprentice and the employer, but also by the Director of the Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards. The state's involvement helps ensure the terms of the apprenticeship are upheld and that the apprentice will receive the necessary training and classroom instruction to guarantee high quality work on the buildings, products and services used by people in Wisconsin.

Apprenticeable Occupations

What makes one occupation suitable for apprenticeship and another more appropriate for another kind of training? The Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards uses several criteria to determine if an occupation should be recognized as apprenticeable. Generally, the occupations must:

- Involve manual mechanical or technical skills;
- Be customarily learned in a practical way through on-the-job training and classroom instruction;
- Be clearly identified and recognized throughout an industry;
- Not be part of another trade already recognized by the Bureau, unless that part becomes practiced and recognized industry-wide as a distinctly identifiable trade.

Since 1911, over 300 occupations have been recognized by the Bureau as apprenticeable. New trades are added as the need arises. Apprenticeship training programs have been developed for many jobs that were once self-taught through trial-and-error or informally taught through on-the-job training alone. The apprenticeship approach has been especially successful in newer occupations in skilled maintenance and in the expanding service industries. In the emerging environmental control and energy fields, new workers are being trained to treat water, air and wastes, to install and service environmental control systems, and in a variety of other technical jobs.

Wisconsin Department of Industry, Labor & Human Relations, 1990
Apprenticeship Q&A

What Is Apprenticeship?

Apprenticeship is a method of training where a skilled craftsperson passes on the trade to the apprentice. It is a combination of classroom and hands-on training under the direction of a skilled worker. With apprenticeship training, there is a written contract between the apprentice, the sponsor and the state. The agreement specifies the length of the training, school hours, an outline of the skills of the trade to be learned and the wages the apprentice will receive. Wisconsin's Apprenticeship Program allows employers to create their own apprenticeship program that provides apprentices with the specific skill training and job-related theory tailored to the company's needs.

What are the Major Benefits to Employers?

Fully-trained, skilled employees that know the business inside and out, from the bottom up.

Apprentices work while they learn. Upon completion of the apprenticeship program, they are ready to contribute to the company's bottom line.

Less turnover because apprenticeship programs attract better job applicants. And, in general, apprentices are more committed to the trade and have higher levels of job satisfaction.

Improves employee relations by creating a closer relationship between management and employee. Apprentices often work their way up to assume leadership roles with the company in the future.

Allows employers to provide career advancement opportunities for employees who wish to enter the apprenticeship program.

What are the Major Benefits to Apprentices?

Apprentices gain valuable skills and knowledge which makes them more marketable in the future.

An apprenticeship often serves as an entry-point into a career that would otherwise be closed to an individual due to a lack of experience.

Apprentices have the opportunity to learn a trade, earn a good wage and have a sense of job security.

Is there a Shortage of Skilled Workers in Wisconsin?

In many fields and industries, employers are becoming more and more concerned about the shortage of job candidates with the necessary skills and abilities. Apprenticeship is a unique program which combines on-the-job training with classroom instruction for an individual willing to learn a trade. By providing employers with the opportunity to train employees to meet their company's special workforce needs, apprentices provide employers with the fully-trained

employees that are the key to a productive and successful business. Productive successful businesses are the key to a healthy state economy.

What Types of Companies have Apprenticeship Programs?

A variety of types and sizes of companies have apprenticeship programs. Both industrial and service trades benefit from apprenticeship programs.

There are too many types of apprenticeship to list them all. Apprenticeships are common in construction, plumbing, machining, electrical, barber/cosmetology, restaurant, funeral home and tool and die making industries.

With few exceptions, any business that requires highly-skilled employees, from the small two-person shop to the large corporation, can benefit from apprenticeships.

What Employer's Costs are Involved in Setting Up and Running an Apprenticeship Program?

An employer's costs in beginning an apprenticeship are minimal. However, when employers decide to sponsor an apprenticeship program, they make a long term commitment to provide an individual training. The employer must insure that a skilled worker is available to oversee the training of the apprentice.

Also, the apprentice must attend required classroom training provided by one of the may local Technical Colleges in Wisconsin. While the number of hours of classroom study varies depending on the program, apprentices must complete a minimum of 144 hours per year, which is approximately one day every other week for a year. While attending the classroom training, the apprentice must be paid. However, the apprentice is responsible for paying for their own books an tuition.

In addition, employers must keep records to document that apprentice's progress during training.

If an Employer is Considering an Apprenticeship Program, What Support and Resources are Available?

The Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards and the Wisconsin Technical College System are partners in delivering the apprenticeship program. There are Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards field representatives in districts throughout Wisconsin who offer employers information and assistance with establishing and maintaining apprenticeship programs.

What is Required to Set Up an Apprenticeship Program?

In order to set up an apprenticeship program, the employer must have occupations suitable for apprenticeship training. If an employer is interested in beginning a program, a field representative will meet with the employer to discuss the possibilities. The Bureau of Apprenticeship Standards uses several criteria to determine if an occupation should be apprenticeable. Generally, the occupation must:

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- Be clearly identified and recognized throughout an industry;
- Not be a part of another trade, unless that part becomes practiced and recognized industry-wide as a distinctly identifiable trade.

If apprenticeable, the field representative will work with the employer to set up the program. This involves work processes and related instruction and is generally the most time consuming part of the process because the program is tailored to the company's needs.

A tour is made of the work area to insure all the training can be provided as outlined and to identify the skilled worker(s) who will assist in the training of the apprentices.

After the program is established, the employer must recruit the applicants and complete the paper work for the agreement.

What is the First Step to Starting an Apprenticeship Program?

Contact the local Bureau of Apprenticeship Office or area Technical College Apprenticeship Coordinator.

What are the Public Benefits of Apprenticeship?

The public benefits from apprenticeships as well. Wisconsin's Apprenticeship Law was adopted to help develop the state's skilled workforce and to help protect those entering the trades. By ensuring a level of uniformity to the training that apprentices receive, it also provides an indirect protective measure to the public who utilizes the structure, products and services that apprentices and graduates build, make and provide.

How Popular are Apprenticeship Programs?

Employers and employees are recognizing the value of the apprenticeship concept. Apprenticeship programs in Wisconsin have experienced tremendous growth in recent years. There are nearly 1,000 more apprentices in Wisconsin this year compared to just a year ago. Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development (DWD) statistics indicate that there are currently 2,767 employers with apprenticeship programs and 8,500 apprentices in Wisconsin, compared with 2,646 employers with apprenticeship programs and 7,625 apprentices in 1995.

Since 1911, over 300 occupations have been recognized by the State of Wisconsin as apprenticeable. New trades are added as industry and technology changes. New programs have been developed for many jobs that were once self taught through trial-and-error or informally taught through on-the-job training alone. The apprenticeship approach has been especially successful in newer occupations in skilled maintenance and in the expanding service industries.